

**IN THE CLAIMS:**

Please amend the claims as follows.

Claims 1-25. (Canceled).

26. (currently amended) A method for promoting the sale of merchandise and services through an automatic vending machine, comprising the sequential steps of:

1) presenting, by a point issuing device in the automatic vending machine, point information determined by the automatic vending machine, the point information related to points issued for promotion of sale merchandise to a user at a time of merchandise sales to the user by the automatic vending machine;

2) transmitting to a center device, by operation by the user of a portable communication device carried by the user, the point information determined and presented by the point issuing device in the point information presenting step, together with identification information for the user;

3) receiving at the center device the point information transmitted from the portable communication device of the user in the point information transmitting step and the identification information for the ~~consumer~~ user;

4) totaling and managing at the center device points corresponding to the point information received in the receiving step for the user; and,

offering the merchandise and services to the user through the automatic vending machine by referring to the points totaled and managed in the totaling and managing step and relating the points to the merchandise and services, wherein:

the point information includes a module code for identifying the automatic vending machine and a secret code related to the points, and

the point information presenting step includes the step of encrypting by the point issuing device at least the secret code among the module code and the secret code before presentation of the point information to the user.

27. (original) The promotion method according to claim 26, wherein the point information presenting step comprises the steps of:

effectively setting a display unit of the point issuing device based on a return signal issued by operation of a return lever of the automatic vending machine;

setting a timer for counting a predetermined time based on the return signal;

displaying on a display unit of the point issuing device the point information based on a money collecting signal for confirming that the sales of merchandise was performed by the automatic vending machine; and

erasing the display of the point information on the display unit of the point issuing device based on when the return signal is reissued by re-operation of the return lever or when the timer times out.

28. (currently amended) The promotion method according to claim 26, wherein

the point information presenting step comprises the step of presenting the point information to the ~~consumer~~ user by printing out the point information on a prescribed form from the point issuing device.

29. (currently amended) The promotion method according to claim 26, wherein  
the point information presenting step comprises the step of presenting the  
point information to the ~~consumer~~ user by inputting the point information to the portable  
terminal carried by the user, by means of communication between the point issuing  
device and the portable terminal.
30. (currently amended) The promotion method according to claim 29, wherein  
the portable terminal comprises a portable telephone set carried by the  
~~consumer~~ user, and  
input of the point information to the portable terminal is performed using  
any of wire communication, wireless communication, infrared communication, and audio  
communication between the point issuing device and the portable telephone set.
31. (previously presented) The promotion method according to claims 26, 27, 28, 29,  
or 30, wherein  
the secret code comprises parity information for checking alteration of the  
point information.
32. (previously presented) The promotion method according to claims 26, 27, 28, 29,  
or 30, wherein the secret code comprises at least a point issue number unique to the  
issued point information, and  
the center device judges duplicate use of the point information based on  
the point issue number.
33. (previously presented) The promotion method according to claim 26, wherein  
the center device manages a state of at least one of the point issuing device  
and the automatic vending machine in which the point issuing device is provided, based  
on the module code.

34. (currently amended) The promotion method according to claim 26, wherein  
the center device manages a status of use of the system by the ~~consumer~~  
user based on identification information for the user transmitted from the portable  
terminal of the user.

35. (currently amended) The promotion method according to claim 26, wherein  
the center device permits the user to read point information stored and  
managed for the ~~consumer~~ user in response to a request from the user using the portable  
terminal.

36. (currently amended) A system for promoting the sale of products and services  
through an automatic vending machine, comprising:

a point issuing device, in the automatic vending machine, whereby the  
automatic vending machine presents to a user of the automatic vending machine coded  
point information related to points issued for promotion of sale of products and services  
upon sale of merchandise by the automatic vending machine;

a center device for storing and managing points corresponding to the  
coded point information presented by the point issuing device, by the user;

a personal communications device carried by the user for transmitting, by  
the operation of the personal communications device by the user, to the center device the  
coded point information presented by the point issuing device, together with  
identification of the user;

update means, provided in the center device, for decoding the coded point  
information transmitted by the portable terminal, and for updating points which have been  
stored and managed for the ~~consumer~~ user based on the points corresponding to the  
decoded point information; and

premium providing means for offering a premium to the ~~consumer~~ user  
by the automatic vending machine based on the points which have been stored and

managed for the ~~consumer~~ user, wherein:

the point information includes a module code to identify the automatic vending machine, and a secret code related to the points; and

whereby, the point issuing device encrypts at least the secret code before presenting the point information and products and services to the user.

37. (previously presented) The promotion system according to claim 36, wherein the point issuing device comprises:

setting means for effectively setting a display unit of the point issuing device based on a return signal issued by operation of a return lever of the automatic vending machine;

a timer for counting a predetermined time based on the return signal;

display control means for displaying on the display unit of the point issuing device the point information on a condition that a money collecting signal for confirming that the sales of merchandises as performed by the automatic vending machine is issued, after the display unit of the point issuing device has been effectively set by the setting means; and

erase control means for erasing the display of the point information displayed on the display unit of the point issuing device based on when the return signal is reissued by re-operation of the return lever or when the timer times out.

38. (currently amended) The promotion system according to claim 36, wherein  
the point issuing device presents the point information to the ~~consumer~~  
user by means of printing out the point information on a prescribed form by the use of  
printing means provided in the point issuing device.

39. (original) The promotion system according to claim 36, wherein  
the point issuing device comprises input means for inputting the point  
information to the portable terminal through a communication between the point issuing  
device and the portable terminal.

40. (currently amended) The promotion system according to claim 39, wherein  
the portable terminal comprises a portable telephone set carried by the  
~~consumer~~ user, and  
the input means inputs the point information to the portable telephone set  
using any of wire communication, wireless communication, infrared communication, and  
audio communication.

41. (previously presented) The promotion system according to claims 36, 37, 38, 39,  
or 40, wherein  
the secret code comprises parity information for checking alteration of the  
point information.

42. (previously presented) The promotion system according to claims 36, 37, 38, 39,  
or 40, wherein  
the secret code comprises at least a point issue number unique to the  
issued point information, and  
the center device detects duplicate use of the point information based on  
the point issue number comprised in the point information.

43. (original) The promotion system according to claim 36, wherein  
the center device comprises an equipment database to store and manage a state of at least one of the point issuing device and the automatic vending machine in which the point issuing device is provided, in correspondence with the module code.
44. (currently amended) The promotion system according to claim 36, wherein  
the center device comprises a user database to store and manage circumstances of use of the system by the ~~consumer~~ user, in correspondence with the identification information for the ~~consumer~~ user transmitted from the portable terminal of the ~~consumer~~ user.
45. (currently amended) The promotion system according to claim 36, wherein  
the center device comprises accessing means which enables the ~~consumer~~ user to access the point information stored and managed for the ~~consumer~~ user, in response to a request made from the ~~consumer~~ user using the portable terminal.
46. (original) The promotion method according to claim 31, wherein  
the secret code comprises at least a point issue number unique to the issued point information, and  
the center device judges duplicate use of the point information based on the point issue number.
47. (original) The promotion system according to claim 41, wherein  
the secret code comprises at least a point issue number unique to the issued point information, and  
the center device detects duplicate use of the point information based on the point issue number comprised in the point information.